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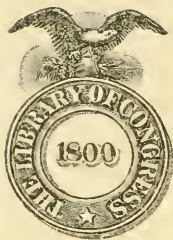
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The Blessed Birthday ♦

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New York City

The Blessed Birthday



The Blessed Birthday

A Christmas Miracle Play

By

Florence Converse



New York

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No. 1

The Blessed Birthday

A CHRISTMAS MIRACLE PLAY

The People in the Play:

THE ANGELS:

The Angel of the Annunciation

The Angel of the Nativity

The Angel of the Resurrection

THE HOLY FAMILY:

Joseph

Mary

Jesus

THE CHILDREN:

John the Baptist

Abner

Hezekiah

Tobias

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

Eli
Ruth
Miriam
Leah

THE WEDDING PARTY:

The Bride
The Bridegroom
The Parents of the Bride and
Bridegroom
The Guests

THE PLACE:

Village houses, low, white, and windowless, with flat roofs, stand about a well in an open place in Nazareth. At the left is the house of the Bridegroom, with a rich eastern carpet laid down over the doorsteps, and an embroidered silk curtain hanging before the door. In the center, at the rear, is Joseph's house. The carpenter's bench can be seen within the wide doorway, and there

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

are shavings littered about the steps. An outside stair crosses the front of the house, going up from the right of the door, to the roof. At the right is the house where Abner, Ruth, and little Eli live. The well is of stones, with a seat built out from the base and running round it. The Angel of the Annunciation, tall, and immortally young, stands at the left of Joseph's door. He wears the livery of the Holy Ghost: the flame color of Pentecost covers him, and his wings are feathered flame. The image of a dove is embroidered on his breast, and his halo is full of rays, long and short, like the rays of a monstrance. He carries Mary's lilies in his hand. The Angel of the Nativity and the Angel of the Resurrection stand, one above the other, on the outside stairway against the wall of Joseph's house. The livery of

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

the Incarnation clothes the Angel of the Nativity: Earth's green and heaven's blue. He holds seven stars in his hand, and the Star of Bethlehem is blazoned on his breast. His halo is three golden rings, one within another, like the rings of Saturn. His wings are streaked and burnished with the blues of the sky; the blues of night and day and twilight, the blue of the zenith and the horizon's blue. Beneath his leafy green surcoat his robe is dim and dark like the trunks of trees at dusk. The Angel of the Resurrection wears the livery of the Lamb of God. He is clothed with a white robe and he bears a palm branch in his hands. His great wings shine with a rainbow shimmer, and they are full of eyes, like the feathers of a peacock. On his breast, set in the midst of golden rays, is the image of a white lamb.

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

Within the circle of his halo shines the sign of the Cross. The Child Jesus sits by the well busily polishing a little wooden box, fitting its cover on and taking it off, examining the edges and corners. His white tunic, falling a little way below his knees, is embroidered around the neck and sleeves with a pattern of blue and purple and scarlet, and these are the mingled colors of his girdle. His feet are sandaled. While he is busy about his little box, the Angels chant the opening words of the Gospel according to St. John. Throughout the Miracle, when the Angels speak, they chant or sing their words. Theirs is the tongue of Holy Writ.

THE ANGELS:

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

The same was in the beginning
with God.

All things were made by him; and
without him was not anything
made that was made.

In him was life; and the life was
the light of men.

And the light shineth in dark-
ness; and the darkness com-
prehended it not.

That was the true Light, which
lighteth every man that cometh
into the world.

He was in the world, and the
world was made by him, and
the world knew him not.

He came unto his own, and his
own received him not.

But as many as received him, to
them gave he power to become
the sons of God, even to them
that believe on his name:

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

Which were born, not of blood,
nor of the will of the flesh, nor
of the will of man, but of God.
And the Word was made flesh,
and dwelt among us, (and we
beheld his glory, the glory
as of the only begotten of the
Father,) full of grace and truth.

*[Mary appears in the doorway of
Joseph's house. She has on
her blue clothes, and the blue
veil over her parted hair.]*

MARY:

Who is singing?

THE ANGEL OF ANNUNCIATION:

Hail, thou that art highly favored,
the Lord is with thee: blessed
art thou among women.

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

MARY:

Gabriel! I thought it was your
voice. And this one with the
stars is another old friend.

ANGEL OF NATIVITY:

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace, good will
toward men.

MARY:

Yes; the night my Son was born,
you were there. But your
brother with the palm branch—

JESUS [*looking up from his work*]:

He is another birthday messenger.

MARY:

I do not remember him.

ANGEL OF RESURRECTION:

Behold, I show you a mystery;
we shall not all sleep, but we
shall all be changed.

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

Awake and sing, ye that dwell
in dust: for thy dew is as the
dew of herbs, and the earth
shall cast out the dead.

MARY:

A mystery?—What does he say?

JESUS [*coming from the well to his
Mother*]:

He says I shall have another
birthday.

MARY:

Oh, my little Son, many, many
more! [*She puts her arms
around him.*]

JESUS:

I shall have a birthday at the
Feast of the Passover.

MARY [*explaining*]:

No, no; now is the time of the
Feast of Dedication—when

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

they built the new temple,
don't you know?

JESUS [*gently*]:

But I shall have a birthday at the
Feast of the Passover.

MARY [*regarding her Son for a moment
with mild perplexity, then
turning to the Angel of the
Annunciation*]:

He has so many strange little
ways. But I keep all these
things in my heart.

ANGEL OF ANNUNCIATION:

He shall be great, and shall be
called the Son of the Highest:
and the Lord God shall give
unto him the throne of his
father David:

And he shall reign over the house
of Jacob forever; and of his
kingdom there shall be no
end.

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

MARY:

That, too, I keep in my heart.

[She looks within the house.]

Joseph, we shall be late for the wedding.—He is getting a little deaf.—Joseph, dear! *[She comes down the doorsteps with her arm around her Son.]*

JOSEPH *[appearing at the door in his brown loose cloak and flowing white head-covering bound about with a crimson turban]:*

I am ready, Mary. *[He comes out into the square, sees the little box lying on the seat by the well, and picks it up to examine it.]*

MARY *[touching his arm]:*

Will you not bid the visitors welcome?

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

JOSEPH:

Visitors? [*He looks about him.*]

MARY:

The angels who have come to
greet my Son on his birthday.

JOSEPH:

Angels, do you say? Well, well!
I have not seen an angel since
Herod slew the innocents.
Where?

MARY:

Yonder, by our house.

JOSEPH [*peering*]:

You and the child have better
eyes. I shall have to take your
word for it. If it were neces-
sary, no doubt I should see
them. [*He holds out his hand
to Jesus, and draws the child to
him.*] What is this you make?
[*Showing him the box.*]

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

JESUS:

A gift for the bride.

MARY:

Poor little dumb bride! He's so
sorry for her.

JOSEPH [*still examining the box*]:

I never taught you to join the
corners so.

JESUS:

No.

JOSEPH:

It is a good way.

JESUS:

It is the way the corners were
joined in the ark of the cove-
nant, to make the cover fit
tight.

JOSEPH:

The ark of the covenant!

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

JESUS:

That the children of Israel made
for Moses, to hold the tables
of the law.

JOSEPH [*with kindly irony*]:

And I suppose you will be telling
me next, that Moses showed
you how.

JESUS [*twinkling and smiling at
Joseph's little joke*]:

Oh, no; I knew how before.

JOSEPH [*amused, but reproving him
gently*]:

Now, now! that's no way to speak
of Moses.

MARY:

He doesn't mean to be irreverent.

JOSEPH [*with indulgent skepticism*]:

I don't know what he means,
but he will be a good carpenter.
Look at that box!

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

MARY:

A carpenter! [*Hastily*]. Well, perhaps. Come, Joseph; come, dear. I should not mind being a little late if this were an ordinary wedding; but with the bride struck dumb two days ago, and her mother nearly out of her mind with grief,—come!

[Mary and Joseph go off together by the lane opening between Joseph's house and Abner's house. Jesus sits down again by the well and polishes his box. The Angel of the Nativity and the Angel of the Resurrection come down to the door of Joseph's house, and the three Angels stand side by side on the doorstep and chant together cer-

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

tain passages from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. The Child fits the box and its cover neatly together and sets the box on the broad well-curb. He rests with his arm on the well-curb and his head on his hand, listening to the Angels.]

THE ANGELS:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

I am he; I am the first, I also am the last.

Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

the heavens: when I call unto them, they stand up together. Come ye near unto me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I: and now the Lord God and his Spirit hath sent me.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end—Amen.

[Children are heard shouting and laughing. Young John the Baptist enters, by the lane at the left, between the Bridegroom's house and Joseph's. He is running and is pursued by Hezekiah, Tobias, Miriam, and Leah. John's tunic is rough undyed

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

homespun; his girdle and sandals are of leather; a lambskin hangs over one shoulder and down his back. In his hand he carries a slender staff with a crosspiece near the top, and a little basket hangs on the crosspiece. The other children wear garments of red, green, orange, brown, blue, or such colors as may be convenient.]

HEZEKIAH [*twitching John's lambskin*]:
Wild boy! Wild boy! Look at
the wild boy!

LEAH:
A Nazarite! See his long hair!
[*She gives John's hair a tweak.*]

TOBIAS [*to Jesus, who has risen and is standing by the well*]:

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

He says he lives with an old holy
man, in the desert.

MIRIAM [*to Jesus*):

He says he's your cousin.

JESUS:

Yes; my cousin John.

[*The two boys regard each other
gravely, with shy awkwardness.
The other children watch them
curiously. Abner and Ruth and
little Eli have come running out of
their house, at the noise. They
stand on their doorstep.*]

RUTH [*crying out suddenly*):

Oh, angels!

ABNER [*rudely*):

Call that an angel! That's a
wild boy from the desert. [*He
moves over to the well, to join
the other children.*]

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

RUTH:

No; I mean over there.

JOHN [*to Jesus*]:

Yesterday, my mother came to see me in the wilderness where I live with the old man, and she said this was your birthday; so I came—I came—[*he falters shyly*]*]*—to tell you I am glad you were born.

JESUS [*shyly, lovingly, taking John's hand*]:

Oh, John!—Oh, thank you, John!

JOHN [*holding out the staff with the little basket swinging from it*]:

I brought you a piece of wild honeycomb,—saved from my breakfast.

TOBIAS [*snatching at the basket*]:

Honey! Wild honey!

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

JOHN [*lifting the staff, with the basket hanging from the crosspiece, high above his head*]:

Leave it be. It's not for you.

[*Tobias, Hezekiah, Abner and Leah struggle for the honey. Miriam stands a little apart, watching them. While Tobias clasps John round the middle, trying to throw him, the others leap and stretch for the basket.*]

JESUS:

Don't let's fight. We'll all have a taste.

JOHN [*struggling*]:

No; I brought it for you.

ABNER [*to Tobias*]:

Trip him,—can't you? Here!
Let me get a grip.

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

[The Angel of the Nativity has come down from Joseph's doorway. He lifts his arm over the heads of the wrestling children, and takes the basket off the crosspiece of the staff.]

MIRIAM:

Look out! You've shaken off
the basket. Don't step on it.

LEAH *[looking among the boys' feet]*:
Where! Where!

[The Angel of the Nativity goes back to Joseph's doorstep, the little basket hanging from his finger.]

MIRIAM:

It dropped. I saw it.

ABNER:

Hezekiah, you've got it.

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

HEZEKIAH:

I have not.

RUTH [*speaking from her doorway,
where she stands holding little
Eli's hand*]:

It didn't drop. The angel took
it off the staff. The angel with
the seven stars.

THE OTHER CHILDREN EXCEPT JOHN
[*frightened*]:

Angels! [*They stand still, looking
over their shoulders, fearfully.*]

RUTH:

Over there by Joseph's house.
Three of them. Eli sees them;
don't you, baby?

ELI:

Eli sees angels. One, two, seven,
forty-leven.

TOBIAS [*to John*]:

Do you see them?

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

JOHN:

Why, yes. They've been there
all along.

MIRIAM:

I see—something. Yes,—I see
one—very faint.

RUTH:

The starry one?

MIRIAM:

I see a lily. I see a dove.

ABNER:

They don't see a thing. They're
doing it to scare us.

HEZEKIAH [*frightened*]:

I see peacock's feathers.

LEAH:

What else?

HEZEKIAH:

Just peacock's feathers—Oh!
[*He covers his eyes*].

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

RUTH:

I know! They've come to the wedding. They're here to welcome the bride.

MIRIAM:

Then they've made a mistake in the house. That's not the bride's house. You tell them, Ruth. You see them better than I do.

JESUS:

They came because it's my birthday. They didn't make a mistake.

ABNER:

Angels!—For your birthday! [*He laughs mockingly.*] Who are you? You're nobody.

[*Jesus looks at him silently.*]

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

RUTH [*coming from her house to join the other children*]:

Shame on you, Abner! Hush!

ABNER:

Nobody!—Nobody!—I bet he
picked up the basket and hid
it.

JOHN:

Well, if he did, it's his. I
brought it to him.

ABNER [*approaching Jesus*]:

Where's the honey, Nobody?

JESUS [*standing quite still*]:

I am—Somebody.

JOHN [*to Abner*]:

You leave my cousin alone.

[*The three Angels come down
Joseph's two doorsteps swiftly,
their garments flying.*]

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

RUTH:

Abner, Abner, the angels are
angry!

*[Abner, startled by Ruth, backs
away from Jesus, involuntarily.]*

JESUS:

They won't hurt you.

ABNER *[recovering himself]*:

There ain't any angels. I don't
see 'em.

*[The three Angels slowly move
backward and stand once more
on Joseph's threshold. Abner
has backed toward his own
house, a little way.]*

ABNER:

Think you can frighten me with
angels, — you, — Nobody! —
Born in a stable!

TOBIAS AND HEZEKIAH *[taunting]*:

Born in a stable!

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

RUTH AND MIRIAM [*reproving*]:

No, boys; don't.

LEAH:

Well, it's true.

ABNER:

Nobody! Nobody! You don't
even know who's your father.

JESUS [*quickly*]:

Oh, yes, I do.

ABNER:

Who?

JESUS:

I'll tell you some day.

ABNER:

Who?

[*Jesus looks at him silently. Abner
sees the little box on the well-
curb. He runs and snatches it
up.*]

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

ABNER:

Tell me, or I'll throw this down
the well.

RUTH:

No, no, Abner! He made it for
the bride.

[Jesus looks at him silently.]

ABNER:

Going to tell me?—When I count
three, it goes down the well.—
Going to tell me?—One!

HEZEKIAH:

Say, Abner, no fair!

TOBIAS:

Shut up, Hezekiah. Don't you
mix in. Let 'em fight it out.

ABNER [*scornfully*]:

Him fight!

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

[Jesus looks silently at Abner, who mounts the seat by the well and holds the box over the well's mouth.]

ABNER:

Going to tell me?—Two!

JOHN [*passionately*]:

You're a bad, bad boy. You'd better be sorry for what you're doing. If you throw that box down the well, Jesus and I will duck you, head down; won't we, Jesus?

JESUS [*tranquilly*]:

But, John, that wouldn't make him sorry.

JOHN [*disconcerted, and regarding Jesus with some exasperation*]:

But we're going to do something to him, aren't we?

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

JESUS [*his face lighting up with sudden merriment*]:

Yes; something.

ABNER:

Laugh at me, will you?—Think
I won't do it, do you?—Once
more!—Going to tell me who
your father is?

JESUS:

I'll tell you some day.

ABNER:

Three! [*He drops the box into
the well. It splashes.*]

[*There is a moment of shocked
silence. The Angels look at
one another and shake their
heads in disapproval.*]

TOBIAS [*with a little squeal*]:

He did it!

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

RUTH:

His little box! His pretty little
box that he made for the
bride.—Oh!

HEZEKIAH:

It wasn't fair.

MIRIAM:

No; it was not.

LEAH:

Lick him, Jesus! Sic the angels
on him, why don't you?

ABNER:

Angels! Your Grandmother! [*To
Jesus:*] Why don't you say
something?—Think you can
scare me? Go home, Nobody!

[*Jesus gazes silently at Abner.*]

JOHN:

Jesus, Jesus! Let me fight him
for you. Please!

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

ABNER [*to Jesus*]:

Go home! We don't want to
play with you. Born in a
stable!

TOBIAS:

Born in a——

HEZEKIAH:

Shut up!

ABNER:

Go home, I say!—We don't want
you. [*He stoops, picks up a
stone, and swings his arm up.*]
Go ho— ah! [*He shrieks.
The stone falls from his hand,
and with it a little snake.*]

[*The children scream and start
backward, all but John, who
runs to the little snake and beats
it with his staff. Abner, be-
tween the well and his own
house, stands stupidly holding
out his hand and looking at it.*]

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

JOHN:

It's dead.

RUTH [*bending over it*]:

A viper! [*She screams.*]

THE OTHER CHILDREN:

A viper! [*They all gaze at Abner in horror.*]

RUTH [*crying*]:

He'll die! My brother will die!

[*Leah and little Eli, who clings to Ruth, also begin to cry. The other children stand silent and horror-stricken.*]

JESUS [*going up to Abner*]:

Don't be frightened, Abner.

Don't be frightened, dear Abner.

[*Abner stands rigid, looking at his outstretched hand. Jesus takes the hand in his, bends his head*

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

down, and gently, slowly, kisses the open palm. Then he closes the fingers over the palm, bends the arm at the elbow, and lays the closed hand against Abner's breast.]

LITTLE ELI [*who stopped crying when Jesus spoke to Abner*]:

Jesus kissed the place and made it all well.

[*The children sigh. Abner, still dazed, opens his hand and looks at it. Then he looks at Jesus gravely. While Abner and Jesus are looking into each other's eyes, the Angels chant these words from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.*]

THE ANGELS:

I will mention the loving kindnesses of the Lord, and the

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his loving kindnesses.

For he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so he was their Saviour.

ABNER [*suddenly bursting into tears and hiding his face in his arm*]:

I can't bear it! I can't bear it!
I threw his little box down the well.—I called him names.—
I can't bear it! [*Still with his arm before his eyes, he turns and runs blindly away from the children and stumbles up against the Angel of the Resur-*

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

rection. He clutches the Angel and sobs, burying his face in the white robe. The Angel of the Resurrection pats him and smooths his hair.]

MIRIAM:

He might have died!—People do.

JOHN:

I'm glad he's sorry at last.

JESUS [*softly*]:

He didn't know what he was doing. Don't let's talk about it any more. Let's eat the honey.

JOHN:

Yes, let's.

JESUS [*looking at little Eli and smiling*]:

Where's the honey, baby?

ELI:

Eli knows.

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

JESUS:

Will you go find it for Jesus?

[Eli runs to the door of Joseph's house, and stops before the Angel of the Nativity. Eli puts his finger in his mouth shyly.]

TOBIAS:

There are Angels!—I see them!

LEAH:

So do I.

MIRIAM:

Three!—and such beauties!

[The Angel of the Nativity stoops and gives the little basket to Eli.]

RUTH:

Make your bow, baby.

[Eli takes his finger out of his mouth, pulls the curl that hangs over his forehead, and bobs his

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

*little head. The Angels smile.
Eli comes back to Jesus and
gives him the honey basket.
The children gather close around
Jesus.]*

HEZEKIAH:

There isn't much. Do you think
it'll go round?

JESUS:

Oh, yes!

RUTH:

Jesus knows how to make things
go round. I've noticed that
whenever he goes shares there's
always enough for everybody.

MIRIAM:

So have I. Umm! Good honey!

LEAH:

Don't give me so much, Jesus.

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

JOHN:

You needn't count me in. I can
have it any time.

JESUS:

But there's plenty, John.

TOBIAS:

Have you got some left for your-
self?

JESUS:

Abner, here's your piece.

LEAH:

After he's been so mean!

JESUS:

We can't begin to eat till you
come, Abner; won't you come?

*[Abner lifts his face from the folds
of the Angel's robe. The Angel
wipes away his tears. Reluc-
tantly, shamefacedly, Abner
comes back to the children.]*

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

Jesus gives him a piece of the honeycomb. They look at each other shyly. Their hands move to their mouths in embarrassed silence. They bite the honeycomb simultaneously, and simultaneously they smile at each other. The other children all laugh. And the Angels chant certain verses from the Nineteenth Psalm.]

THE ANGELS:

The law of the Lord is perfect,
converting the soul: the testi-
mony of the Lord is sure,
making wise the simple.

The statutes of the Lord are
right, rejoicing the heart: the
commandment of the Lord
is pure, enlightening the eyes.
The fear of the Lord is clean,
enduring forever: the judg-

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

ments of the Lord are true and
righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than
gold, yea, than much fine
gold: sweeter also than honey
and the honeycomb.

RUTH:

Listen! The Angels! Do you
hear them?

ANGEL OF NATIVITY:

Glory to God in the highest!
Glory to God in the highest!

ANGEL OF ANNUNCIATION:

And on earth peace!
Glory to God in the highest!

ANGEL OF RESURRECTION:

And on earth peace,
Good will toward men!
Glory to God in the highest!

THE THREE ANGELS:

Glory to God in the highest!

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

And on earth peace,
Goodwill toward men!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

MIRIAM:

What song is that?

JESUS:

My birthday song. The angels
sang it the night that I was
born.

LEAH:

But it's not true that you were
born in a stable.

JESUS:

Oh, yes; it's true.

*[The children have been standing
in a little group in front of the
well, eating their honey. They
look at one another, abashed.]*

MIRIAM:

Do you remember it?

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

JESUS:

Yes; quite well.

LEAH:

How did it feel to lie in hay, in
a manger?

JESUS [*merrily*]:

It tickled.

[*The children laugh.*]

HEZEKIAH:

My mother told me there were
shepherds saw you in that
stable.

ANGEL OF NATIVITY [*coming down
Joseph's steps, lifting his hand
to command attention, and sing-
ing in a loud voice*]:

Behold, I bring you good tidings!

RUTH:

He's going to tell us something.
He wants us to be still.

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

[*Ruth, Miriam, and little Eli sit down on the steps of the Bridegroom's house, on the bright carpet. Tobias, Hezekiah, and Leah scamper up the outside staircase of Joseph's house and sit about halfway up, Hezekiah and Tobias side by side on one stair, and Leah two stairs above them. John the Baptist is kneeling on the well-seat with his elbows on the well-curb and his chin in his hands, looking across the well at the angels. Abner leans against the wall of his house and Jesus goes and leans beside him, against the house. Presently Abner links arms with Jesus.*

ANGEL OF NATIVITY [*chanting certain portions of the Gospel according to St. Luke*]:

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

It came to pass in those days,
that there went out a decree
from Cæsar Augustus, that all
the world should be taxed.

And all went to be taxed, every-
one into his own city.

And Joseph also went up from
Galilee, out of the city of
Nazareth, into Judæa, unto
the city of David, which is
called Bethlehem; (because he
was of the house and lineage
of David:)

To be taxed with Mary his
espoused wife, being great with
child.

And so it was, that, while they
were there, the days were
accomplished that she should
be delivered.

And she brought forth her first-
born son, and wrapped him in

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night.

ANGEL OF ANNUNCIATION [*moving down one step and taking up the tale*]:

And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

And the angel said unto them:

ANGEL OF NATIVITY [*in his clear, triumphant voice*]:

Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

For unto you is born this day in
the city of David a Saviour,
which is Christ the Lord.

And this shall be a sign unto
you; Ye shall find the babe
wrapped in swaddling clothes,
lying in a manger.

ANGEL OF ANNUNCIATION:

And suddenly, there was with
the angel a multitude of the
heavenly host praising God,
and saying,—

THE THREE ANGELS:

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace, good will
toward men.

ANGEL OF ANNUNCIATION:

And it came to pass, as the angels
were gone away from them
into heaven, the shepherds
said one to another,—

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

THE THREE ANGELS:

Let us now go even unto Bethle-
hem, and see this thing which
is come to pass, which the
Lord hath made known unto
us.

ANGEL OF ANNUNCIATION:

And they came with haste, and
found Mary, and Joseph, and
the babe lying in a manger.

And when they had seen it, they
made known abroad the saying
which was told them concern-
ing this child.

And all they that heard it won-
dered at those things which
were told them by the shep-
herds.

But Mary kept all these things,
and pondered them in her
heart.

And the shepherds returned,

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

glorifying and praising God for
all the things that they had
heard and seen, as it was told
unto them.

MIRIAM:

Oh, what a darling story! Isn't
there more?

HEZEKIAH AND LEAH:

More! More!

TOBIAS:

What about those kings? My
father said there was a story
about kings, but he didn't
believe it. Neither did I.
Was it true?

JOHN THE BAPTIST:

True! Of course it was true!
There were three of them.

HEZEKIAH [*to the Angels*]:

Oh, do tell us about the kings.

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

ANGEL OF ANNUNCIATION [*chanting
certain portions of the Gospel
according to St. Matthew*]:

Now when Jesus was born in
Bethlehem of Judæa in the
days of Herod the king, be-
hold, there came wise men from
the east to Jerusalem, saying,—

ANGEL OF NATIVITY:

Where is he that is born King of
the Jews? for we have seen
his star in the east and are
come to worship him.

ANGEL OF ANNUNCIATION:

When Herod the king had heard
these things, he was troubled,
and all Jerusalem with him.
And when he had gathered all the
chief priests and scribes of the
people together, he demanded
of them where Christ should be

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

born. And they said unto him,—

ANGEL OF RESURRECTION [*moving down to stand beside the Angel of the Annunciation*]:

In Bethlehem of Judæa: for thus it is written by the prophet,
And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

ANGEL OF ANNUNCIATION:

Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said,—

ANGEL OF NATIVITY:

Go and search diligently for the

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

ANGEL OF ANNUNCIATION:

When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

ANGEL OF NATIVITY:

When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

THE THREE ANGELS:

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshiped him: and when they had

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

opened their treasures, they
presented unto him gifts; gold,
and frankincense, and myrrh.

HEZEKIAH [*jumping up, and running
down the stairway*]:

Jesus is our king! Jesus is our
king!

RUTH AND MIRIAM [*running to Jesus
and taking his hands*]:

Come, Jesus! Come and be
king!

TOBIAS AND LEAH [*hurrying to join
the other children*]:

Come sit by the well, Jesus!
Play it's your throne!

[*The Angels and John the Baptist
go to the door of the Bride-
groom's house, and take up the
carpet by the four corners, and
spread the carpet over the seat
by the well. The children pull*

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

and push Jesus to the well and make him sit down. The Angel of the Resurrection goes to the well, behind Jesus, on the other side of the well-mouth, and mounts to the well-curb. Standing upright on top of the broad well-curb, with his great wings spread wide, he is the back of the throne. The Angel of the Annunciation stands on the curving well-seat at the left of Jesus, and the Angel of the Nativity stands on his right. So these two, standing upright, but a little below the Angel of the Resurrection, and with their wings spread wide, are the arms of the throne. And the three take hands. Between and beneath them, as under a canopy of cherubim and glory, sits the

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

child Jesus, smiling at his playmates. The children stand before Jesus, at the right and the left of the throne. Abner, John the Baptist, Ruth, and little Eli are on the left hand. Leah, Miriam, Tobias, and Hezekiah are on the right.]

JOHN:

He ought to have a crown.

RUTH:

We can make believe he has many crowns on his head.

MIRIAM:

We can make believe a scepter.

TOBIAS:

Jesus, when we're grown up we'll give you a crown, and a scepter in your hand, and we'll put a purple robe on you.

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

*[The three Angels bend their heads
and hide their faces in their
hands. Jesus gazes straight
ahead, gravely, as if he saw
something sad a long way off.]*

HEZEKIAH *[shouting, and lifting up
his arms]:*

Hail, King of the Jews!

RUTH *[lifting up her arms]:*

Hail, Everybody's King!

THE CHILDREN *[standing with up-
lifted arms]:*

Hail!—Hail!—Hail!

*[When the children cry Hail! the
Angels lift up on high the palm
branch, the lilies, and the seven
stars. Little Eli runs to Jesus,
scrambles up on the seat beside
him, puts his arms around
Jesus's neck and kisses him.]*

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

And Jesus hugs little Eli. In the distance trumpets are heard.]

ABNER [*crying out in anguish*]:

The wedding! Oh, can't we get the little box out of the well? Can't we?

JESUS:

Don't cry, Abner. I'll give the Bride something else.

[Jesus gets up from his throne; all the other children, except Abner, have run to look down the lane between Joseph's house and Abner's. The Angels descend from the well and carry the Bride's carpet back to the Bridegroom's house. They spread the carpet tidily before the door and over the steps. The trumpets are heard again, nearer. Jesus and Abner are left by

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

the well. Abner kneels on the well-seat, looking over the curb, down the well.]

ABNER:

I want her to have the little box.

I shall always want her to have the little box.

JESUS [*putting his arm over Abner's shoulder*]:

I'm sorry, Abner.

ABNER [*turning and flinging his arms around Jesus*]:

Oh, Jesus, why did I do it?
Why did I?

JESUS:

Abner, I love you; and you love me. We're friends.

ABNER [*lifting his head and smiling*]:
Yes; we're friends.

[*The trumpets sound close by.
The Angels have gone up the*

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

outside stairway of Joseph's house and stand one above another, on the stairs; the Angel of the Resurrection at the top, and the Angel of the Nativity and the Angel of the Annunciation in order below him.]

LEAH:

Hurry, Jesus! Abner, here they come!

MIRIAM:

See the Bride! How sad she looks! Only three days ago she could speak, like us. And now she's dumb.

TOBIAS:

And the Bridegroom is sad, look! He didn't have to marry her when she lost her tongue. But he stuck to his bargain.

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

My father says he's a good fellow.

HEZEKIAH:

It's too bad Jesus can't give her the little box. I hope my bride won't go dumb when I get married.

RUTH:

Hush—ssh! They'll hear you!

[The Bride and Bridegroom, their parents, Mary, Joseph, and other wedding guests, some with trumpets and cymbals, come into the little square by the lane between Joseph's house and the house of Abner. They wear the wedding garments of the East. The faces of the Bride and Bridegroom are sad. As he leads her past Joseph's house she looks up and sees the Angels on

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

*the stairs. She stands still,
pulls the Bridegroom's sleeve,
points up at the Angels. The
wedding procession halts behind
her.]*

BRIDEGROOM [*trying to lead her on*]:
Not this house, the next is ours.

*[The Bride falls on her knees and
lifts up her hands to the Angels.
They lift their hands and point
to Jesus.]*

BRIDE'S MOTHER:

My daughter, my daughter!
What new affliction is this?
Come home to your husband's
house.

RUTH:

She sees the Angels.

THE PEOPLE [*looking up and gaping*]:
Angels! Where? Where?

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

BRIDEGROOM'S FATHER:

Nonsense! Come, my son, we must get her into the house.

[The Bridegroom and his Father lift up the Bride and support her between them to the threshold of the Bridegroom's house. She looks at them beseechingly and moves her lips but without a sound. Jesus has joined his Mother, and they have come from the rear of the procession, circling the front of the well, and are standing at the Bridegroom's threshold when the Bride is brought there.]

BRIDEGROOM:

Speak to her, Mary. She is frightened. Welcome her; comfort her. You know how to comfort.

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

MARY:

Do not tremble so, little dove.
Welcome to Nazareth! Wel-
come, dear neighbor! See,
this is my little Son. He has a
gift for you.

[The Bride looks at Jesus and her face becomes quiet. After a moment she puts out her hands and draws him to her. He lifts his face, standing on tiptoe, and she bends hers. They kiss. The Bride looks up from the kiss, startled. Joy and amazement light her face. She opens her mouth and bursts into singing. Jesus stands, gazing up at her, and smiling happily. The people are transfixed in amazement.]

THE BRIDE *[singing portions of the One Hundred and Third Psalm]:*

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

Bless the Lord, O my soul: and
all that is within me, bless his
holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and
forget not all his benefits:

Who forgiveth all thine iniqui-
ties; who healeth all thy dis-
eases;

Who redeemeth thy life from
destruction; who crowneth thee
with loving kindness and tender
mercies;

Who satisfieth thy mouth with
good things; so that thy
youth is renewed like the
eagle's.

Like as a father pitieth his
children, so the Lord pitieth
them that fear him.

The Lord hath prepared his
throne in the heavens; and his
kingdom ruleth over all.

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

Bless the Lord, ye his angels,
that excel in strength, that do
his commandments, hearken-
ing unto his word.

Bless ye the Lord, all ye his
hosts; ye ministers of his, that
do his pleasure.

Bless the Lord, all his works in
all places of his dominion:
bless the Lord, O my soul.

THE PEOPLE [*crying out in astonish-
ment*]:

A miracle! A miracle!

THE ANGEL OF THE RESURRECTION
[*standing at the top of the stair-
way, he chants from the Book
of the Prophet Isaiah*]:

Thus saith the high and lofty
One that inhabiteth eternity,
whose name is Holy; I dwell
in the high and holy place,

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

with him also that is of a
contrite and humble spirit,
to revive the spirit of the
humble, and to revive the heart
of the contrite ones.

I have seen his ways, and I will
heal him: I will lead him
also, and restore comforts unto
him and to his mourners.

I create the fruit of the lips:
Peace, peace to him that is far
off, and to him that is near,
saith the Lord; and I will heal
him.

THE CHILDREN [*suddenly bursting out
into the Birthday Song*]:

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace, good will
toward men.

THE ANGELS [*singing with the children*]:
Glory to God in the highest!

THE BLESSED BIRTHDAY

Glory to God in the highest!
And on earth peace!

THE PEOPLE [*singing with the Children
and the Angels*]:

And on earth peace!
And on earth peace!
Good will toward men!
Good will! Good will!
Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace,
Good will toward men!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!



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12